A GUIDE FOR SERVERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Rev. Jeffrey Pulling, M.Div., Ph.D.
Office of Ministry Resources, UFMCC
P.O. Box 14529
Hartford, CT 06114

1988

- The Place of Holy Communion in Worship
- The Liturgy of Holy Communion
- The Importance of the Eucharist in MCC's Identity and Mission
- Theological Interpretations of Holy Communion
- Guidelines for Distributing Communion Elements
- A Sample Order of Holy Communion

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THE PLACE OF HOLY COMMUNION IN WORSHIP

In MCC Sunday worship the sacrament of Holy Communion forms the climax of the worship service. After gathering and preparing ourselves for worship with our opening songs and prayers, listening to God's message for us in Scripture readings and sermon, and responding to God with our prayers and offerings, we then celebrate God-in-Christ's presence among us in Holy Communion. This sacrament is sometimes called the Eucharist, or "thanksgiving".

We call Holy Communion a "sacrament", and by this we mean a visible, tangible means of encounter with God. Two traditional criteria for what constitutes a sacrament are (1) it is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; and (2) the act has been instituted or commanded by Jesus. The number of sacraments recognized by various branches of Christianity ranges from two to seven. The two recognized by all of Christianity are the two also embraced by MCC, namely Baptism and Communion. Baptism is the initiation sacrament, and Holy Communion is the nurture sacrament. Baptism signfies our being brought into the Church, into the family of God. It is done once to represent our rebirth as a child of God. Holy Communion, as the nurturing sacrament, is done repeatedly because we need to be continually nourished, fed, and strengthened.

As a visible, physical means of encounter with God, the sacraments involve common, everyday elements and images. Baptism involves water, bathing, burial, and arising. Holy Communion involves real edible food and drink, eating and drinking, sharing in a meal together.

For the Eucharistic bread, some MCC congregations use Communion wafers, some unleavened bread (matzah or pita), and some leavened loaves (even home-made). For the "fruit of the vine", some MCC's use wine, some grape juice, and some both. The use of grape juice by itself or in addition to wine is very common in MCC because of the high incidence of alcoholism among gay/lesbian people. Another option not yet widely used is the new no-alcohol wine.

THE LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION

From very early in Christian history, the sacrament of Holy Communion has had four parts:

(1) the offertory, the offering of bread and fruit of the vine, often with the monetery offerings;

(2) prayer of blessing and thanksgiving, sometimes called the Prayer of Consecration;

(3) the breaking of bread, sometimes done while the Words of Institution are being said, sometimes at a later point called the Fraction (or Breaking);

(4) the distribution of the elements, administering the bread and fruit of the vine to those present.

These four parts can be summarized as the four steps of taking of the elements in an offering of food and money, giving thanksgiving for them in prayer, breaking the bread that it might be distributed, and giving the Communion to the people.

To this basic four-part structure many liturgical elements have been added, such as Offertory Prayers, Sursum Corda ("Lift up your hearts'), Sanctus ("Holy"), separation of Prayer of Consecration from Prayer of Thanksgiving, the Mystery of our Faith, and Blessing and Invitation.

Many MCC's insert a Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness as an entrance into the Holy Communion liturgy. This placement of Confession has the advantage of assisting worshippers to prepare for the sacrament by first examining themselves. A disadvantage is that it starts this joyful, celebrative sacrament off on a somber, even negative note. Many more traditional churches insist on placing the confessional rite toward the beginning of the worship. In so doing they follow the liturgical pattern of Isaiah 6, where coming into God's presence evokes a feeling of unworthiness and one thus confesses one's sinfulness in order to then fully participate in worship. It has been said that liturgically, confession belongs at the beginning of the service, but psychologically that does not work for modern Christians. People usually do not come to worship with a sense of sinfulness, but they may be convicted during the sermon that they do need to change something in their life, or they may see that certain things are blocking their relationship with God and with others. An alternative placement for the confessional rite is after the sermon in a time of silent reflection and self-examination in response to the message, or as part of the Prayers of the People.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EUCHARIST FOR MCC'S IDENTITY AND MISSION

See the attached reprint of *Salt of the Earth Resources*, April 1988 issue, "Our Eucharistic Mission"

THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF HOLY COMMUNION

In a Fellowship as ecumenically diverse as MCC, it is difficult to theologize about the Eucharist (or anything else, for that matter). Our experience, however, as churches learning to live and worship together has reinforced certain traditional theological aspects of this sacred meal.

(1) CHRIST'S PRESENCE. In the sacrament of Holy Communion Christ somes to us and is present in a special way. There are many different views as to how Christ is present when we celebrate this sacrament. There is the transubstantiation view that the bread and fruit of the vine are transformed, actually becoming the body and blood of Christ. There is the consubstantiation view that Christ is present with, in, under, and through the elements, but that they remain bread and fruit of the vine. There is the memorial meal view that this is done in memory of Christ Jesus, that Christ is present in the minds and hearts of the participants.

The Statement of Faith in the UFMCC Bylaws leaves the matter of the real presence of Christ open to individual belief. It states that "Holy Communion is the partaking of blessed bread and fruit of the vine in accordance with the words of Jesus, our Sovereign: 'This is my body...this is my blood." It is not important that we reach a theological consensus in MCC on how Christ is present in Holy Communion. The important thing is that Christ is present. Whether you believe that the elements are transformed, or they represent Christ, or they represent the action of God for us in Christ, whichever way you believe, Christ really is present in this meal. Christ communes with us, and we with Christ as we eat this meal, as we share together.

(2) A COMMUNAL MEAL. Holy Communion may have very deep personal meaning for us, but it is always celebrated in community - with other people. We don't celebrate the Eucharist by ourselves because it is a meal. It is something we join in together as sisters and brothers. We are one family of God, and sharing together in Holy Communion is a weekly reminder of that. In this sacrament we celebrate our oneness, our unity: our oneness with Christ and our oneness with sisters and brothers. When Christ comes into us and becomes a part of us, we then become part of Christ. We become a member of the Body of Christ. This means for us union with Christ and union with each other. We become in a certain sense one with Christ and one with fellow believers. We share in this sacramental meal as the family of God.

(3) BECOMING THE BODY OF CHRIST. This sacrament enables us to become the Body of Christ. By participating in this symbolic meal, by taking Christ into ourselves, we let Christ invade our body and blood, and then we corporately can become the Body of Christ. This is what we are called to be, to be members of the Body of Christ, to be Christ in the world today, to do the work of Christ in our time and place. In Holy Communion we are nourished and equipped to do this. Because this is a meal of spiritual food, we are nourished to go on with our living, to continue giving of ourselves, to keep on growing, to become the children of God that we are meant to be. By partaking of the body and blood of Christ, we open ourselves up to becoming the Body of Christ.

(4) THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE INTERMINGLED. Holy Communion involves recollection of the past, present experience, and future hope. It is important to affirm that this sacrament is all three of these, and not just one. First, we look to the past. We do this in remembrance of Christ Jesus. We recall what happened at the Last Supper and the passion that followed. We re-enact what Jesus did. We recall his words, remember his actions, and re-think their meaning for us. We remember God's gift to us of Jesus, how God acted in Jesus to deliver us from our sinfulness and to liberate us from the forces of evil and death.

Second, in the present, in the here-and-now, we experience the Spirit of Christ with us nourishing and equipping us. The risen Christ is present in us, around us, among us. That which was past does not remain in the past; it becomes present to us now. It is not just a matter of our remembering Christ, but also knowing Christ's presence now in our midst. It is not just a matter of remembering that the first Christians felt united with Christ; we are also united with Christ ourselves now in the present.

And third, we look to the future. We anticipate what is to come. We can experience now oneness with Christ and oneness with each other, but only in part, only in fragmentary ways. But one day this oneness will be fully realized in ways beyond anything we can imagine now. We look forward to the Kingdom of God, the Dominion or Reign of God when we will all share at God's banquet table, when we will celebrate our life with God forever.

So in Holy Communion, the past, present, and future are intertwined. We state this symbolically in the commonly used MYSTERY OF OUR FAITH: "Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again."

GUIDELINES FOR DISTRIBUTING COMMUNION ELEMENTS

It is both a wonderful privilege and awesome responsibility to serve Communion to others. In so doing, you are serving as an instrument for these persons' encounter with God. It is impossible for us to be "pure vessels" of God's grace all the time, but we can attempt to be more open and receptive "channels" for God's grace to flow through.

Undoubtedly, you have seen and heard firsthand how the Communion elements are served in MCC - in a very embodied way with laying on hands, a personal prayer or blessing, and often holding, a hug, or a kiss. This very physical and personal way of serving Communion is different from the way Communion is done in most other churches. This style, however, is an important part of MCC's ministry - affirming our bodies as good and as vehicles of God's love, reaching out to the lonely and oppressed with tangible care. The more you observe and practice the MCC style of Communion, the more natural and appropriate it seems. Keep in mind, however, that many people you will serve may never have had a personal prayer said aloud for them before. You will also be ministering to many lonely people (and some whose sexual interaction is impersonal or nonexistent), and the hug you share with them may be the only time they are hugged all week!

There are several ways to approach your personal words for each person, couple, or group that you serve. Your words may be in the form of a blessing (addressed to the person), or in the form of a prayer (addressed to God and for the person). If you are not accustomed to praying individually for others and/or praying spontaneously, you might want to plan ahead a little and think in general terms what you want to say to the people who come to you for that service. You may want to pick up an aspect of the sermon message (especially if it can be applied to Christ nourishing and equipping us to do something). You may want to focus on a Eucharistic theme or idea that you have read about in this guidebook. Once you have the security of knowing in general what you are going to say or pray, then you might feel more freedom to respond personally to individuals and their needs as they approach you.

In almost every MCC congregation there will be some persons who are particularly wounded or needy on a given Sunday or for over a period of time. It is generally best not to linger too long over one individual in the administration of Communion, because you will be making other people wait who do not understand what is going on, and you may embarrass that individual too.

Other ways of dealing with persons during Communion who need personal attention or praying that cannot be handled in short fashion:

(1) Have a pastoral staff member or capable lay person on "stand-by" (sitting in front pew), who can talk and pray with the individual.

(2) Have a separate station that does not not administer Communion elements, but which persons may go to in addition to (or instead of) Communion for personal attention and prayer.

Option #2 of a separate station is especially important if your church wants to offer prayers for healing, anointing with oil, etc. Healing prayers cannot be quickly dispensed with since they often require some interaction between the individual and the person praying for them. Also, it is awkward for Communion servers to get oily fingers from the anointing oil and then try to keep on serving the elements. Why not have only one person with oily fingers?!

If an accident happens, and some elements drop to the floor, don't panic. The wine/juice should be cleaned up as much as possible (ask someone sitting nearby for help). Wafers or bread that have fallen should be set aside and not served to someone. Afterwards the wafers/bread can be disposed of reverently by ingesting them or burying them in the ground. Do not throw them in the trash can or garbage disposal.

Left-over wine/juice may be drunk at the close of serving or after the worship service (whatever your local church practice is). Left-over wafers can be stored and used again. Left-over bread should be eaten (during or after service) or buried in the ground.

A SAMPLE ORDER OF HOLY COMMUNION

OFFERTORY PRAYERS

O God, we present to you our monetery offerings. This represents us, our labor, and our resources, which we now dedicate more fully to your service. Give us the wisdom to use these tithes and gifts so that you may be better known and your will more fully done on this earth.

Praise be to you, O God. You are Sovereign of all creation. We offer to you this bread, which represents all that we eat to nourish our bodies. May it become for us the bread of life, which feeds our spiritual hunger.

Praise be to you, O God. You are the Sustainer of the universe. We offer to you this fruit of the vine, which represents all that we drink to satisfy our physical thirst. May it become for us the cup of salvation, which refreshes our spirits.

Eternal God, we ask you to receive these gifts of bread and fruit of the vine, which are set aside for the glory of you and for the welfare of us your people. May the sharing of the bread of life and of the cup of salvation bond us with you and with each other. AMEN.

OPEN INVITATION

In MCC we celebrate an open Communion. This is Christ's table, not our table; and Christ Jesus invites to this meal all who will come. We recall the words of Jesus when he said, "I am the bread of life; they who come to me shall not hunger, and they who place their faith in me shall not thirst. All that God gives me will come to me; and those who come to me, I will not turn away."

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

Celebrant: God is with you.
People : And also with you.
Celebrant: Open up your hearts.
People : We open them up to the living God.
Celebrant: Let us give thanks to our loving God.
People : It is right to give to God thanks and praise.
Celebrant: Yes, it is right that we should at all times and all places give thanks to God for all that God has done for us. Let us celebrate this Eucharist as a thanks-giving to God, our Source, our Savior, and our Sustainer.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

The night Jesus was betrayed and arrested, he was at supper with his friends. He took bread, and when he had given thanks to God, he broke the bread and gave it to those who were with him, saying, "Take, eat. This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And after the supper, Jesus took the cup and when he had given thanks to God, he gave it to his disciples, saying, "Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for all people for the

forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you shall drink it, in remembrance of me."

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Let us pray:
Spirit of God, Spirit of life and power, come upon us who are gathered here today. Pour yourself out upon us. Come upon this bread and this fruit of the vine that in this Holy Communion we may partake of the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus for ourselves. May we who share in this meal be made one with Christ and one with each other. Spirit of God, nourish and empower us to be the Body of Christ here in this city and area where we live and work and worship. Come Risen Christ, live in us that we may live in you. AMEN.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Celebrant: Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith.
People : Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

BLESSING AND INVITATION (holding up the elements)

The Body and Blood of Christ Jesus were given for us. May this meal which Christ has prepared strengthen and preserve us unto eternal life. The gifts of God for the people of God. Come and share.

SHARING THE SACRAMENT (the distribution)

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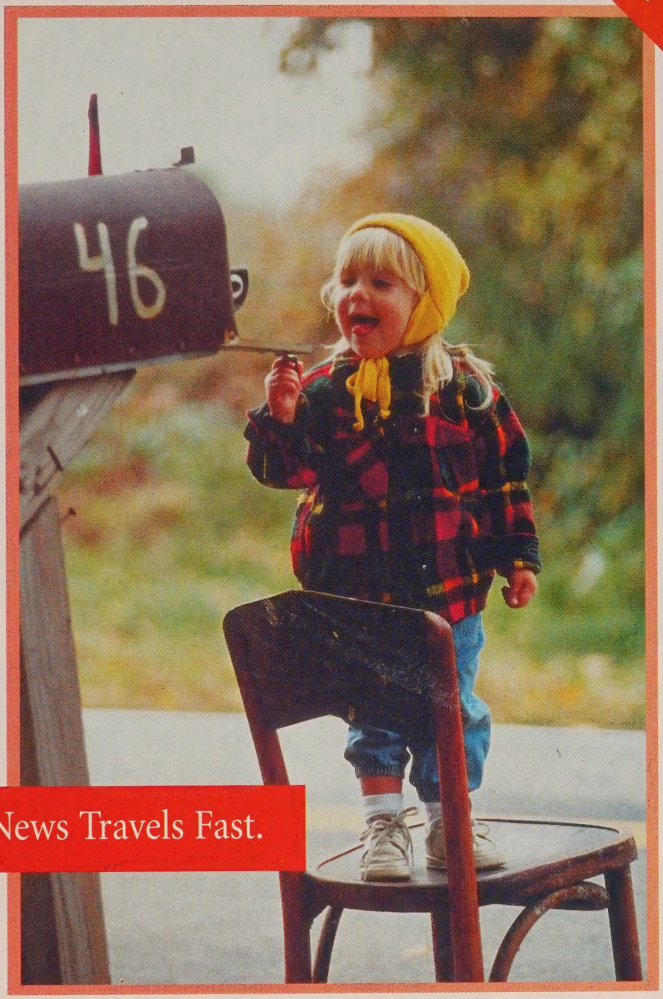

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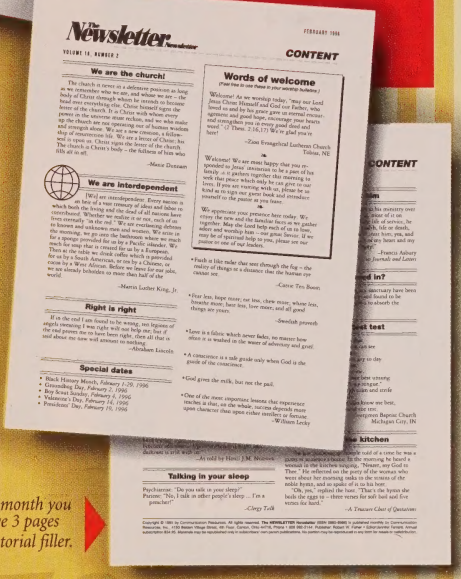

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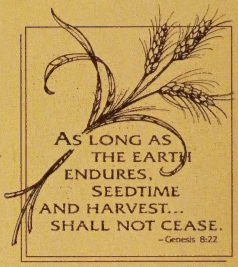

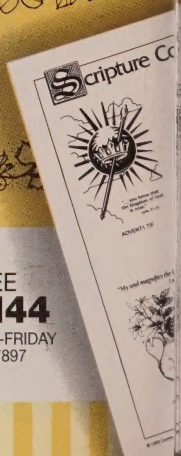

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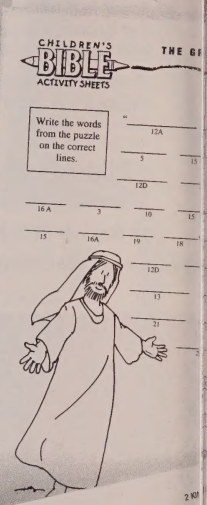

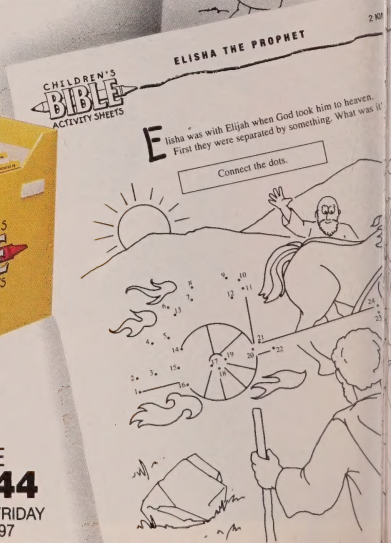

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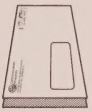

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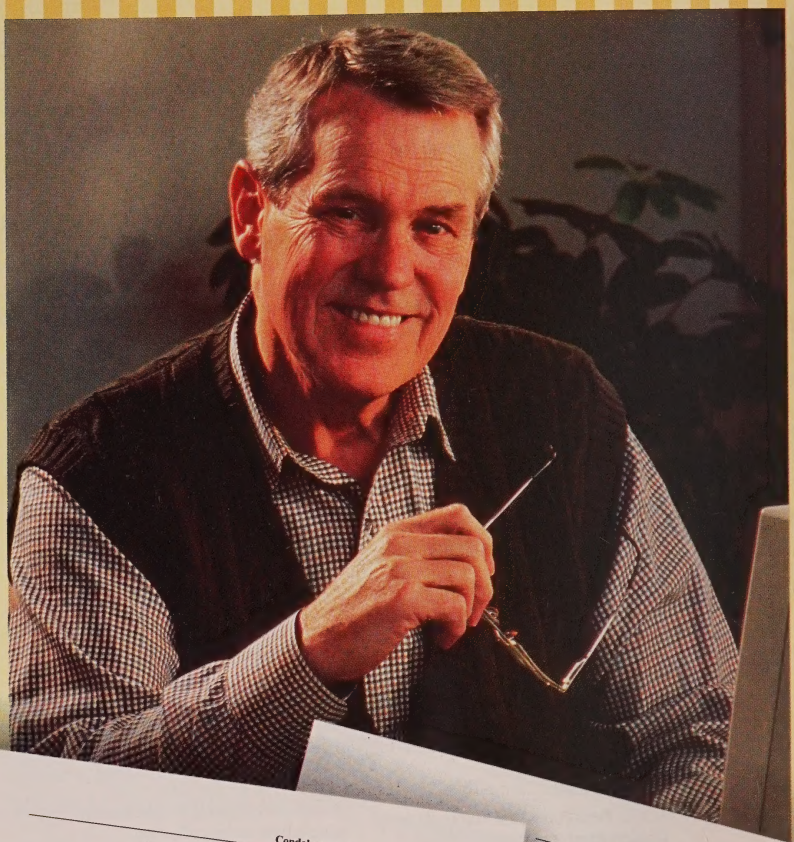

Condolence to bereaved at Christmas

Date

Name
Street Address
City, State ZIP

Dear Name,

While taking part in our preparations for all the joyous special services and events of the Christmas season, my mind and heart go out to you because I cannot forget this will be your first Christmas without your beloved Stephen. The grief you are experiencing is hard to bear at any time. At Christmas, it is likely to be wrenching.

Please remember that your church and pastor are sharing your grief. We are with you, available to you, anxious to help lighten your load. According to Matthew's Gospel (1:23), the prophet applies the name EMANU-EL ("God with us") to the little boy who would be born on that first Christmas day. Let this letter be a loving reminder to you that God is with us, especially with those who mourn -- "that they may be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Help us, please, to help you find comfort during this season of joy which God has sanctified for us by the gift of the Christ child. May you be filled with faith and hope even in the midst of inescapable grief. This is the prayer of your pastor and friend.

With my prayers,

Your name typed

Congratulating on winning sports even

Date

to learn that you won, not just on
Tri-County Swim Meet. My warme
h I had been there to help che

ve been aware of the rig
rry on in addition to y
ularly respect you for staying
ur heavy investment in the sport in

unnecessary but born of sincere
ut the extreme competitiveness of
from olympic athletes on down, feel
one prize, the first prize; as if
or that matter, one's personal
hless, a cause for shame, a reason

ctory at the Tri-County Swim Meet,
in and often. But I also know
to win comes. But in your heart.
your conduct, but in your heart.
al best is all that God expects

for the champ, I am,

Sincerely yours,

Your name typed

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rces for today's congregations.

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Calls to Worship

28

Leader: At every bend in the river, at every fork in the road,
People: Christ waits.
Leader: At every surprising turn and in every corkscrew twist,
People: Christ lingers.
Leader: At every T-junction and in every
People: Christ tarries.
Leader:

...journey not
...walked the
...we raise

...God.
...is God.

...a

...us,

...Date

...Date's used

Benedictions

8

God's love go before you, Christ's blessing be around you and the Spirit's joy be within you.

_____ Date's used

...thoughtfully instructed, grate-
...ment and to walk into God's

_____ Date's used

_____ Date's used

...God's Spirit strengthen
...songs, shapers of peace,

_____ Date's used

...light. Carry God's love
...e you so you may scatter
...and build bridges of

_____ Date's used

_____ Date's used

...of justice and

_____ Date's used

ayers of Confession

Advent

...God, there is no stopping us now. There is so much to do before Christmas and ...on the move. We are making our lists and checking them twice. We hear "The ...e Days of Christmas" and pray we'll have twice as many. We are looking for ...s of holly and dreaming of a white Christmas. We see sugar plums, red-nosed ...eer, twinkling lights and mistletoe in every store window.

...God, this season can be such a jumble and rush. Through it all, in it all and in ...of it all, restore the sense of whom we are waiting for. Let us get ready our ...s as well as our homes to receive the Savior of the world. Amen.

_____ Date's used

...of star and sign, lead us into the depths of mystery. Guide us in the way of ...iveness and place in us songs of joy.

...of the journey and God of this holy place, walk with us in times of trouble, hold ...when we tremble and cry, and be with us when we face our darkness. Dwell with ...in the holiness of this moment. In the name of the Babe of Bethlehem. Amen

_____ Date's used

...w hard it is to wait for you, O God. We long for the stillness of a holy night; we ...gerly want to feel again the radiant joy of your birth. And, we want peace on earth ...d peace in our families to last for longer than a day.

...e look forward to your coming, yet dread it at the same time, for there is much that ...ades under your glance. We have harbored resentments, cherished possessions, ...mored others, defended our errors.

_____ Date's used

...ender God, may your coming through Jesus bring a lasting joy and a reformed life. ...teach us to wait hopefully and expectantly. Amen.

4

...Everpresent God, in the darkness of Mary's womb, the holy Child grows. In the ...darkness of the world's pain, the blessed light begins to kindle. In the darkness of our ...own doubting of you and our lack of faith in ourselves, the great hope begins to rise ...again like a lump in the throat. Christ will be born again into our world and into us.

...O God, forgive the times we look with a cynical eye on the advent of peace in our ...world. Forgive us for doubting the light you have placed within each of us. Forgive ...us for ignoring the lump in our throats and the wonder of your love for us. With the ...birth of the Christ Child, let your forgiveness cleanse the darkness of our inner ...selves. And let the love of Christ shine in us like a star. Amen.

_____ Date's used

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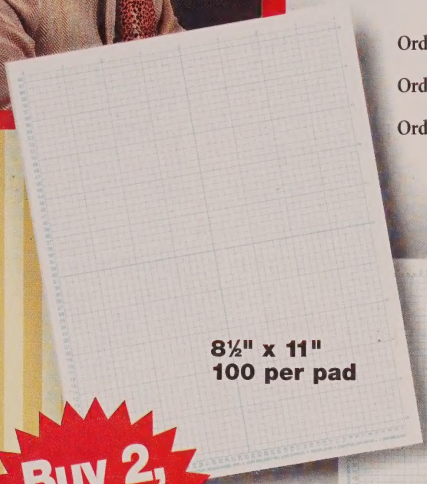

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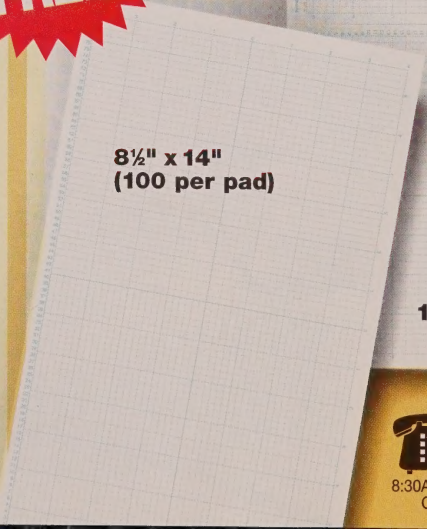

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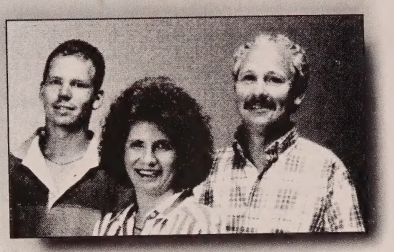

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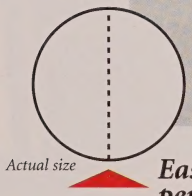

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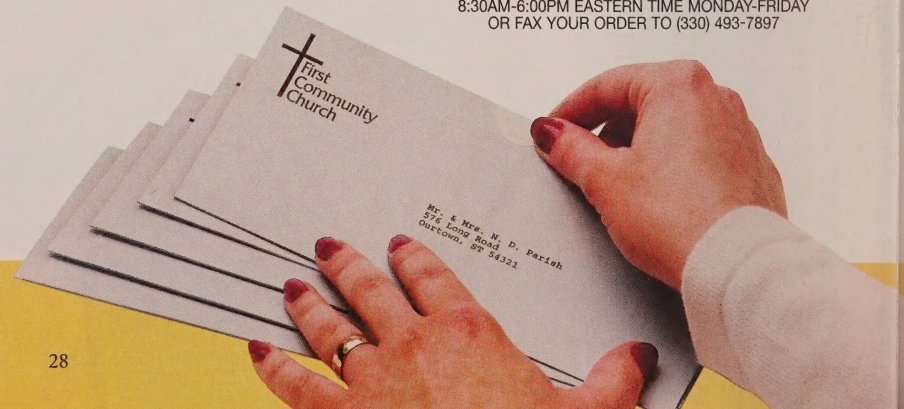

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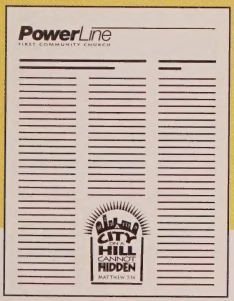

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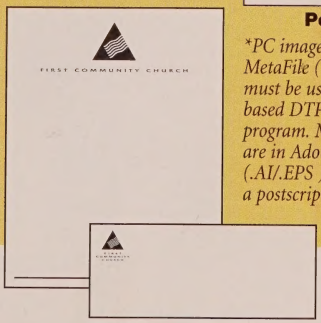

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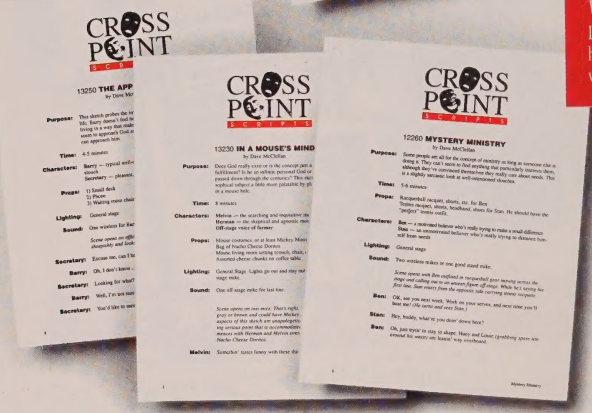

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yourself. You may sense the presence of God when you recall your baptism, or at prayer, or in hearing the word of God. But few moments in life reach you as directly as does this weekly opportunity at the Lord's Supper.

What are you thinking as you receive the bread and wine, or when you return to your chair and listen to the choir and the organ, or, sometimes better, when you enjoy the silence broken only by the footfall of the communing people and the word "for you" spoken to each? What are you thinking as you join in the brief hymn to the LAMB OF GOD who "takes away the sin of the world"?

The act of communing takes but seconds, and participating in a congregational COMMUNION only a few minutes. Today, as so often before, you resolved to use the time to good advantage. Will you have done so? Admit it, some days your resolve goes as quickly as it came. You were going to concentrate on the "for you . . . for forgiveness." Instead your mind wandered, and you cannot later recall anything at all of what passed through it. Not a trace of ecstasy went with this personal moment in the meal. You were in the presence of God and, had it not been for the slight nervousness you felt going up to the front of an assembly, you might have stifled a yawn. You let some passing thing distract you. A scuff on the shoe of the minister. The smell of nicotine on a ministerial hand. The choir singing a bit flat, a jar to your musical sensibilities. A candle dripping on the new church carpet. Had you remembered to have that spot removed from the back of your coat? What will people think? Who donated those altar flowers? Will I get a raise this week?

Here you are, back in your seat. Should you feel guilty about having let the moment pass? Isn't it just human nature to have a wandering mind? You really don't believe the people who claim they can clear their heads and have pure and constant contact with God. There must be a lot of hypocrites here. Why did so little happen?

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sin-sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.

When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since *it* was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator:* You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ —which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian

television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, woebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what *is* forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer par excellence of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "*see* Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymity: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshipers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table.They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jenson's *Visible Words,* points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16–17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

5. "In the Morning . . ."

The Communion being ended, and your reflections too, the ministers clear the table and replace the cup and plate while you join in singing the CANTICLE, a short hymn of thanks. The minister offers a PRAYER, pronounces a BLESSING on you and all the people, and says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." (This used to be: "*Ita missa est*"—"the mass is ended; go in peace." Hence the term *mass.*) So you go in peace. You glance at your watch, wondering whether the service was over-long, given the rather large communing congregation today. A secular thought crowds in. Has the roast burned? I've got to catch Harry and Marge to see about our get-together on Friday. Will that weak battery start the motor? Such thoughts were not completely out of mind during the service. They are with you yet. But God is present among people whose minds wander, whose attentions stray, whose staying-power is short. He is present in a sanctuary that never quite leaves behind its world. God is also present in a world that should become a sanctuary. His peace goes with you into that world.

You greet the ministers at the door, as you did back when they passed the peace of Christ, you chat with some friends, the car does start, the roast is only slightly burned, and most of the day is still ahead of you. By evening you will have passed through some of the usual cycles of boredom, drift, anger, and frustration. You hollered at the children. You grumbled about having to go to work tomorrow. You bet wrong on that choice of an evening

the LORD'S SUPPER

MARTIN E. MARTY

FORTRESS PRESS PHILADELPHIA

yourself. You may sense the presence of God when you recall your baptism, or at prayer, or in hearing the word of God. But few moments in life reach you as directly as does this weekly opportunity at the Lord's Supper.

What are you thinking as you receive the bread and wine, or when you return to your chair and listen to the choir and the organ, or, sometimes better, when you enjoy the silence broken only by the footfall of the communing people and the word "for you" spoken to each? What are you thinking as you join in the brief hymn to the LAMB OF GOD who "takes away the sin of the world"?

The act of communing takes but seconds, and participating in a congregational COMMUNION only a few minutes. Today, as so often before, you resolved to use the time to good advantage. Will you have done so? Admit it, some days your resolve goes as quickly as it came. You were going to concentrate on the "for you . . . for forgiveness." Instead your mind wandered, and you cannot later recall anything at all of what passed through it. Not a trace of ecstasy went with this personal moment in the meal. You were in the presence of God and, had it not been for the slight nervousness you felt going up to the front of an assembly, you might have stifled a yawn. You let some passing thing distract you. A scuff on the shoe of the minister. The smell of nicotine on a ministerial hand. The choir singing a bit flat, a jar to your musical sensibilities. A candle dripping on the new church carpet. Had you remembered to have that spot removed from the back of your coat? What will people think? Who donated those altar flowers? Will I get a raise this week?

Here you are, back in your seat. Should you feel guilty about having let the moment pass? Isn't it just human nature to have a wandering mind? You really don't believe the people who claim they can clear their heads and have pure and constant contact with God. There must be a lot of hypocrites here. Why did so little happen?

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sin-sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.

When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since *it* was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator:* You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ —which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian

television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, woebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what *is* forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer par excellence of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "*see* Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymity: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshipers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table.They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jenson's *Visible Words,* points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16–17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

5. "In the Morning . . ."

The Communion being ended, and your reflections too, the ministers clear the table and replace the cup and plate while you join in singing the CANTICLE, a short hymn of thanks. The minister offers a PRAYER, pronounces a BLESSING on you and all the people, and says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." (This used to be: "*Ita missa est*"—"the mass is ended; go in peace." Hence the term *mass.*) So you go in peace. You glance at your watch, wondering whether the service was over-long, given the rather large communing congregation today. A secular thought crowds in. Has the roast burned? I've got to catch Harry and Marge to see about our get-together on Friday. Will that weak battery start the motor? Such thoughts were not completely out of mind during the service. They are with you yet. But God is present among people whose minds wander, whose attentions stray, whose staying-power is short. He is present in a sanctuary that never quite leaves behind its world. God is also present in a world that should become a sanctuary. His peace goes with you into that world.

You greet the ministers at the door, as you did back when they passed the peace of Christ, you chat with some friends, the car does start, the roast is only slightly burned, and most of the day is still ahead of you. By evening you will have passed through some of the usual cycles of boredom, drift, anger, and frustration. You hollered at the children. You grumbled about having to go to work tomorrow. You bet wrong on that choice of an evening

the LORD'S SUPPER

MARTIN E. MARTY

FORTRESS PRESS PHILADELPHIA

yourself. You may sense the presence of God when you recall your baptism, or at prayer, or in hearing the word of God. But few moments in life reach you as directly as does this weekly opportunity at the Lord's Supper.

What are you thinking as you receive the bread and wine, or when you return to your chair and listen to the choir and the organ, or, sometimes better, when you enjoy the silence broken only by the footfall of the communing people and the word "for you" spoken to each? What are you thinking as you join in the brief hymn to the LAMB OF GOD who "takes away the sin of the world"?

The act of communing takes but seconds, and participating in a congregational COMMUNION only a few minutes. Today, as so often before, you resolved to use the time to good advantage. Will you have done so? Admit it, some days your resolve goes as quickly as it came. You were going to concentrate on the "for you . . . for forgiveness." Instead your mind wandered, and you cannot later recall anything at all of what passed through it. Not a trace of ecstasy went with this personal moment in the meal. You were in the presence of God and, had it not been for the slight nervousness you felt going up to the front of an assembly, you might have stifled a yawn. You let some passing thing distract you. A scuff on the shoe of the minister. The smell of nicotine on a ministerial hand. The choir singing a bit flat, a jar to your musical sensibilities. A candle dripping on the new church carpet. Had you remembered to have that spot removed from the back of your coat? What will people think? Who donated those altar flowers? Will I get a raise this week?

Here you are, back in your seat. Should you feel guilty about having let the moment pass? Isn't it just human nature to have a wandering mind? You really don't believe the people who claim they can clear their heads and have pure and constant contact with God. There must be a lot of hypocrites here. Why did so little happen?

4. Reflections during Communion

The minutes of reflection during Communion do not allow time for developing a well-rounded theology. Indeed, they hardly suffice for sustaining a simple sequence of serious thought. But one can use this time, with or without some hymns or prayers, to place a few little mental levers on a few spiritual fulcrums, in order to lift them at other times, in other places. One might reflect, for example, on the feelings experienced, the forgiveness received, the presence promised, or the commitment entailed.

Experience

What am I supposed to feel? Am I *supposed* to feel? The whole idea of receiving forgiveness of sins implies recognizing how far you are from God and in how much need you stand. But what if you do not *feel* guilty or agonized?

You have to admit that different personality types will react variously. William James talked about "the sick soul" and "the healthy-minded" as psychological models. The sick soul will have no difficulty feeling in need of forgiveness. The trembling of a leaf has made hearts leap in fear from Leviticus to Luther to modern times. The whole universe seems then to be personified. It takes the form of the accusing finger of God. The victim of such sin-sickness may simply be working out some problem left over from a bad childhood. Parents placed too many restrictions on the conscience, and adult life became nothing more than a "Do I dare?" or "Someone is watching!" Such a person hesitates to take bold action, fearing the consequences.

When time for confession comes, such a sick soul is like a junkie let loose in a pharmacy: All the options are there, in dazzling array. If you are a sin-sick soul, as the psalmist was when he made a river of his bed because of tears, you are able to spill out whole catalogs of faults. So you examine the recesses of the heart and there find every kind of ugliness. You have not done anything worse than anyone else, but you feel worse. You know that before God the greatest faults, while they may mess up human relations more than do the sneaky little faults, violate above all the divine image. True, God forgives them as completely as others, but you still feel they demand a heroic assault.

Once upon a time you were taught to load up everything for a bimonthly crusade against sins at Communion. If you were fortunate, your church encouraged private confession. While you could and should always confess your faults against the person you offended, all faults, especially hidden ones, were faults against God. The minister became a representative person who could speak as it were for God. Ministerial words also became symbolic ways of hearing the human race reaffirm you. They personified the congregation. God was gracious, but now the human family was shown to include "gracious others."

If you did not make a private confession, every Communion service included a group opportunity for exposing your sinfulness to God through rite and ceremony. If such confessions stood the risk of turning routine—and you had to admit that the pose of the average congregation suggested that most people were pretty casual about what they were saying and doing—for you, at times at least, they were wonderful instruments for unburdening. You placed your sins on the strong shoulders of Christ, and the minister in the name of God absolved you of, or forgave,

those sins. Somehow you had to work out a logic by which you again brought them to the Lord's Table only minutes later. Since *it* was "for forgiveness," you were to leave sins there and walk back to the pew refreshed, with a clean slate on which to start piling up a whole new batch of sins.

Seriously, you knew that this script was not how it was supposed to work. Popular piety had things a bit wrong here. When you gathered your thoughts in an adult study class, the accent was different. There you heard a translation of the phrase *simul iustus et peccator:* You are at the same time the just person made just by the act of Christ, and the sinner kept sinful by your humanity and your acts. "At the same time" meant that when God looked at you in Christ, through Christ, because of Christ —which figuratively meant at you in your baptismal robes, identified with Christ, or here at supper with him—God did not see you as a half-safe, half-sinful being. You were not 99 and 44/100% clean and every day in every way getting better and better through positive thinking about the cross. No, God looked at you and saw Christ. Insofar as God made you just through the grace of Christ which you received in faith, you lacked nothing.

"At the same time" also meant that the God who looked at you when you stood apart from Christ saw nothing to like. This God was not impressed by your claim to have met the Lord. A bumper sticker asserting that you were born again or had received the Holy Spirit meant no more spiritually than do the annual rival claims that Notre Dame or Texas or Nebraska are number one in football. In fact, your greatest temptation—not to need God—occurred precisely in your spiritual life. Especially in our time, when *Psychology Today*, Eastern religions, and scores of Christian movements peddle techniques for meditating, you are tempted to buy into one of these mechanisms and put a claim upon God. When competitive Christian

television programs teach you how to praise God better than others, and be more pious than others, there is a danger that you will use your praise and piety to bind God, to take away the freedom of God. You will be saying, "Notice me, Lord!" All the while you are therefore not relying in faith on the gift of Jesus Christ. You are busy parading virtues, and God is saying, "Forget it! Your virtues at their best are not good enough."

The fact that you feel the need to do such parading suggests that you are a sick soul and need a remedy. You have come, then, to the right place. There is no magical transaction called confession/absolution, or confession/Lord's Supper. But in this meal you receive the gifts of Jesus Christ. You did not earn them and you did not earn a place at this banquet, but by baptism you are identified and united with Christ. As in baptism you symbolically came out from under the water, gasping for life because you had been "dead," so literally—in the Christian scheme—you did already die, and rose, with Christ. When you go to the Lord's Supper, then, as you kneel you are not bringing your adding-machine totals of the sins you want forgiven. You are bringing your whole self in need, and with the loaf and the cup you are receiving the forgiveness that assures you that your whole self is full of well-being.

You know, then, what you are supposed to feel.

William James also spoke of the religion of "the healthy-minded." He thought it was especially attractive to those who joined the Christian Science movement, liberal Protestantism, or something that was then called New Thought. Such people believed that there was an essential harmony to the universe, that all they had to do was tap into it. Mortal mind or negative thinking might interrupt the flow, but a person could realize a return to the original harmony. Such a system of faith is at odds

with the Christian drama that proclaims a disruption of that harmony. Humans created and create discord and chaos. They do not hear the purity of the angels on the morning of creation. They do not stir to the trumpets of the messengers of God. They toot their own horns and sing their own praises. Well-being is not a part of a flow. It is a divine gift that interrupts all our natural ways of expecting wholeness.

While healthy-mindedness as a system is beyond the scope of this Lord's Supper, the healthy-minded psychological style is present among Christians. The Bible and Christian history display characters who did not make a river of their beds with tears. Martin Luther may have felt threatened by a thousand devils and by a judging God who was too near, but in your healthy-mindedness you do not. You see no point in pretending. You find nothing especially attractive or Christian in those otherwise blithe people who think they please God by bowing lowest, kneeling longest, and groveling most visibly: "Look, God, I really got good at confessing!"

The healthy-minded or blithe Christian type is a personality that, fully aware of the fallenness of creation, grasps its beauty instead. After the resurrection of Christ, the first signs of a new order, a new creation, are here for affirming. This kind of Christian takes bits of sand and dye, fuses them, and produces stained glass through which you see the sun break on the sanctuary floor with a foretaste of heavenly sparkles. The New Creation Christian takes the disordered sounds of diesel engines, clanging pots, and scuffling feet and reorders them into scales and tones until you hear overtones of the music of the spheres. This Christian walks the hospital corridors aware of death but sings quiet songs because God is also at work healing. Healthy-mindedness is not positive thinking apart from God but a psychological and spiritual bearing

that finds God to be not the Judge but the One who intended and intends concord.

The blithe type lives with spiritual hazards that are as great as those brought by the grovelers. If you find yourself toward the healthy-minded part of the spectrum, you may use the Lord's Supper as a time to become especially alert to these dangers. The silences for self-examination are excellent opportunities for this. You might be riding for a fall. That is, you may be sunny about your faith because you have not yet been tested. No cloud has yet shadowed you. Wait until you find that your child is suffering from a debilitating disease. Let an economic disaster wipe out your assets. Some day someone important to you will find great fault with you and announce a breach. For all the smiles in the world, you cannot backslap your way into a new relation. Then some of the illusions with which you lived will drop.

Healthy-mindedness may imply a faulty spiritual diagnosis. You have heard the familiar statements of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace: "I like to commit sins. God likes to forgive them. The world is admirably arranged." Or "I can sin; that's my business. God will forgive; that's the business God is in. We will keep each other busy." These are flippant translations of attitudes that color many easy lives. None of them measures the cost to God of the cross or the cost to humans of discipleship. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it becomes nothing. But if it dies, it brings forth fruit. No one follows Jesus without taking up a cross and denying the self. Jesus knew what was in humans and searchingly stripped the disciples themselves of their claims upon God—because Jesus loved his disciples and did not want them to rule God out of their lives by their casualness.

In order to be sure that healthy-minded psychological types come to spiritual depth, the preacher in every sermon

will proclaim the law of God. In some contexts, the law of God is God's power that enables one to see what it is that care of the neighbor establishes. But in the present context, the law of God does nothing but accuse. You thought you were doing all right because you did not kill? Jesus says that if you hate, you are a murderer. You thought you were pretty healthy because you stayed married and faithful to one partner and never committed adultery? You all have committed adultery when you merely looked, or even thought, lustfully. Martin Luther liked to say that if you did not feel sinful you should reach inside your clothes and pinch yourself to see if you are still flesh and blood.

What are you supposed to feel? In some epochs and some congregations, preachers and counselors have to cool people off. Don't feel so much, they say; you are so busy enjoying your miseries that you do not even recognize that there is a Physician and that he has cured. But you, if you are healthy-minded, live in a different kind of age and place. Most sermons urge you to probe yourself more deeply. But you can build a wall against God if you start making the relation with God the basis of your own self-esteem; that will not work. The preacher's admonition to self-examination need not force you to change your personality type or your outlook on the New Creation. It only asks you to be serious. You are to see things not through illusion but as they are. The Christian faith calls you to realism about the disharmonious universe in which babies die, the innocent die, and you will die. There is a fundamental lack of fit in the way the world is now put together apart from Christ, and its misfit character will not go away this side of eternity, despite the victory of Christ.

What are you, then, supposed to feel? If not sniveling, woebegone, sub-Christian blues, you are to acquire awareness. You who are called "miserable sinners" may not feel miserable. But—to update an old illustration

from the era of trains—like occupants of an aircraft in which a time bomb is set in the baggage compartment, though you feel fine about your martini and your magazine, you *are* miserable. You are part of the misfit situation. You need rescue. You need help. At the Lord's Table it is not necessary for you to conjure up all kinds of *emotions*; you simply need to be *aware* of need and to realize the forgiveness of sins.

Forgiveness

Some weeks at the Lord's Supper you might wish to set your lever for reflection under another great burden: the concept of forgiveness. That this forgiveness of sins is "for you" is now clear by everything in the event, but what *is* forgiveness? Do we exaggerate its importance?

Jesus made much of it when he chose to forgive a person in need of physical healing, even though that meant offending the religious leaders. Give those leaders credit. They asked, with a proper sense of regard for holy things, "Who can forgive sins but God?" They were not likely to cheapen forgiveness. Paul busied himself with writing letters telling people how the forgiven should learn to live together as Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. But along the way he spent many energies detailing what forgiveness meant for him and his readers. Through Christian history Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and a large company of others saw forgiveness as a central image for the basic movement of a loving God to mortals.

So it is that in the late twentieth century we have inherited something we can call "the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins." Whole church bodies claim it as their possession. It is their badge and banner. With it they make their claim, "We're number one!" They use it to show what all the second bests look like, because the others own

lesser chunks of the doctrine or because they have it all wrong. In the nineteenth century, Americans paraded their Monroe Doctrine. One night a man was tarred and feathered and run out of town. A stranger came upon the miserable victim and asked him what had happened. It seems that there had been a loyalty test and a dispute about this aspect of foreign policy. What had the tarred man said or done wrong? He answered, "I didn't say I don't love the Monroe Doctrine. I do love the Monroe Doctrine. I live by the Monroe Doctrine. I would die for the Monroe Doctrine. I simply said I don't know what it is." We wonder whether the people with the tar pots and baskets of feathers knew.

You are at the Lord's Table, assured that the forgiveness of sins comes "for you." It is easy to think, "I belong to the right club. I can show God the right credentials. I am loyal to my tribe. I love the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I live by the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. I would die for the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins. But I simply do not know what it is." If so, you have difficulty reflecting on it at Holy Communion. You wish to do better.

First of all, remember that a doctrine does not save. God saves. You need not even call it a doctrine, especially in times when many people use that word to suggest that the life has already gone out of a reality. In their minds—and why play into their problems?—a doctrine is a gravestone you place over the bones of something that once lived. It is a boundary you place around something your ancestors found important. A doctrine or a dogma is an attempt by humans to define the indefinable, to step across the boundaries of mystery and speak overconfidently about the secrets of God. In a time when people do not know who they are, they use the idea of a doctrine to set boundaries. In that case, a doctrine is not a witness to their

love of truth but a mark of their sense of mutual suspicion. Since you cannot trust anyone, you have to ask whether they line up on the wrong or right side of a precisely defined doctrine. The fact that doctrines and dogmas have other, better uses is not of much help here. Let other people on other days rescue the concept of doctrine. You are a hungry person needing food, not recipe books. You seek the forgiveness of sins at the Lord's Supper.

Second, since in church you have time for clarity but not research, you might want some day to study the way the forgiveness of sins may be an obsolete badge of distinction for a church body or two. The Spirit of God works surprises these days, and the spread of divine grace is sufficiently broad that what once looked like a unique property or witness of an evangelical church now turns up on many hands. Four centuries ago, reformers of the church looked around and honestly did see some Christians turning God's gift of forgiveness into a human transaction. People were using their energies to impress God. The faithful bought or visited relics, went on pilgrimages, pursued processions, paid for masses, purchased indulgences, and did what they could to buy the favorable attention of God. They were just as often busy piling up merits to impress God, so that God dared not act unfavorably to people who were owed so much for having helped keep the universe on track. No matter how ecumenical one's spirit, those pages of history cannot be obscured. Roman Catholics, heirs of that unreformed Christianity, today point this out in very public scholarship.

Unreformed Christianity underwent reform. You will hear some people who feel called to draw boundaries for God saying that wrong teachings about forgiveness are still on those other churches' books. Maybe it would be nice if church bodies did feel obliged to retrace their steps to all

the old libraries and councils, call new councils, and bring out their erasers. But churches do not work that way. They write with far more vivid new inks over fading pages. Today it is more valuable to listen to evangelical Catholic sermons, where the message of the forgiveness of sins comes through loud and clear. *The Jerusalem Bible*, which Catholic scholars and publishers would like to see in every home, is a highly public document. Its footnoted versions stress the free gifts of the forgiveness of sins in every crucial passage. This is disappointing to some leftover anti-Catholics. What fun is the Lord's Supper, if there are fewer people to be anti- as we enjoy it? But a Christian spirit also impels you to express joy for the spread of grace. This realization, plus common agreement over the meaning of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper, has built a sense of holy but not yet constant frustration among many Roman and other catholic Christians. Why do we stay apart at the Lord's Table? Who are we to build fences where the Host does not?

A third focus for reflection is this: You do not need the words *forgiveness of sins* to express the new relationship you have to God in Christ. In some ways, these words can be code words, a metaphor through which Christians can connect with many biblical themes. Through most of the pages of the Hebrew Scriptures that you call the Old Testament, repentance and forgiveness are not the prime statements. Yet the Old Testament is the church's book. God was active among his people. This God was a loving, caring, and, yes, forgiving agent. The Hebrew Scriptures busied themselves with talking about how God was shaping a people and covenanting with them out of steadfast love.

In the Gospels, Jesus is the bearer of forgiveness, but forgiveness is not the only word on his lips. Jesus calls for obedience. He asks for discipleship. Because, for many,

forgiveness symbolizes the basic trajectory of God's movement to humans, they expect to hear about nothing else. Yet Jesus does what the situation demands. When someone is ill, Jesus *may* be abrupt: "Your sins are forgiven!" But just as often he may simply heal the physical illness, and we do not hear about outcomes having to do with forgiveness. His Good Samaritan is someone who pours on oil and wine and foots the bill for the clinic, without—so far as we know—passing out tracts or preaching sermons on forgiveness.

Paul, who had persecuted the church, found it easy to feel agony over guilt. He was tortured by his need for forgiveness. So he became a proclaimer par excellence of that teaching. But, as we already noted, he spent as much time telling the forgiven how to live together, or to have holy lives, as to be forgiven. So you too do not need to have a specific code word or formula in mind when you want to realize the gift of the Lord's Supper.

When your church wrote its older books of worship and teaching, debate over forgiveness was prime. Martin Luther was of the sick-souled type, who projected his struggles from the monastery onto the movement that followed him. In the modern play *Luther* John Osborne has Luther railing against the empty heavens, as if God were remote: "God is dead." The real Luther had the opposite problem. For him the heavens were full and close, and God was too near, too threatening. A holy God might annihilate an unholy human. Divine perfection could not coexist with human imperfections. The monk tried every rule and every discipline, but still each trembling leaf caused him to cower. When, in the writings of Paul, Luther discovered the forgiveness of sins, the monk naturally chose to use it as the basic image of the loving divine movement.

Today, it is often noted, many people have a different problem. They are there with John Osborne's fictional

Luther. Their God is remote. Where Luther asked, "Is God gracious?" they ask, "Is God?" Their doubts may not lead them to verge on simple atheism. Such Christians put their problem in different ways. They will complain about the lack of meaning in their lives. Where once the simplest peasants could endure every kind of setback because God would reward them in heaven, now eternal life has become a very vague concept for them. While once God seemed to be pronouncing a perpetual benediction on their towns, so that all knew their places, now urban life seems plotless. Typical words that people use—perhaps you use—to describe the modern condition in which most of us share are alienation, brokenness, meaninglessness. We seek reconciliation, wholeness, meaning.

Say words like reconciliation, wholeness, and meaning, and you come very close to the center of Christian witness. Jesus Christ reconciles God to humans, and humans to each other. Wholeness virtually serves as a synonym for salvation, for well-being under God. Jesus Christ the risen one brings meaning because he is the first sign of the New Creation, the new order of being. It is hard to see why anyone should feel guilty about using words like these to express the experience of grace in the Lord's Supper. Christ the physician offers the gift of a cure for what ails us. If he and we have varying names for the disease—and thus, in a way, subtly different diseases—we shall welcome marvelously varied remedies. Forgiveness of sins, then, is a blanket term for the whole relationship that Jesus effects and which is "for you" in the Lord's Supper when grasped by faith.

While writing these pages, I had occasion to consult Edmund Schlink's *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* to see what he and they had to say on this subject. Under "Forgiveness" the index said, "*see* Gospel; Justification; Lord's Supper; Word of God." Under three of those four categories "forgiveness" did not appear at all; the book

treats it as a synonym for gospel and justification! Under "Word of God," there are seven brief references to the subcategory "of forgiveness." One of these citations does suggest synonymity: "forgiveness of sins is the same as justification" in the confessional writings. And Schlink develops a thesis: "The Gospel is the word of forgiveness through which God justifies the sinner for Christ's sake"; indeed, the Gospel, say the confessions, is "the promise of forgiveness of sins and justification because of Christ."

When we introduce the "-ation" words like "justification," it is easy to clutter and confuse the mind of a modern person who wants to experience forgiveness, to realize wholeness, in the event of the Lord's Supper. How are you to think of what the code words suggest? Most important is the idea that you do not bring something with which to impress God. God shatters whatever is in your hand. The law of God accuses and annihilates you. Then God, acting through and because of Christ, creates a new you, a baptized person-in-Christ. That is what it means to be a forgiven person, to experience an act or a motion of divine forgiveness.

You can now see why this forgiveness is the core of Holy Communion. The body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper are the body and blood of Christ on the cross. The cross was for you, and so is the Supper. In the meal the cross is a present-day reality. The risen and ascended Christ is present in this form and at this event. Just as preaching, received in faith, is not mere talk about forgiveness but actually works forgiveness, so the Lord's Supper, received in faith, is not a pageant displaying the story of a forgiving God. It is God in action, effecting forgiveness, creating the new. The Large Catechism uses vivid language about the Lord's Supper not as a prescription but a remedy: "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his

gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." Maybe you had not quite counted on having to take on "the devil and all devils," but this remedy is designed to help you do just that. And there may be a better way of conceiving what is wrong than the way of superficial diagnoses about personality types, symptoms of imbalance, Oedipal complexes, or maladjustment to the modern condition. The Lord's Supper is "the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new person." It is "a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also." Here is another bonus, and you do not have to join a therapeutic club in the church to share the benefit.

Forgiveness means liberation. Classically, this liberation refers to freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But it is possible to hear of this only in the context of middle-class America and not to envision all the other settings in which Christians look for liberation. In the concentration camps the Lord's Supper meant forgiveness of sins, but it also depicted a zone of human freedom into which believers hoped God would lead them again. Under governments that repress the faith, communicants cannot help but include their prayers and hopes for escape from such bondage. Late in the twentieth century in Latin America and elsewhere in what is called the Third World, Christians hungry for political and economic freedom have developed a "liberation theology." In its terms, worshipers want the Lord's Supper to be freed from the cozy bindings in which the rich celebrate it.

To the liberation theologian, many biblical motifs have come to be neglected by churches in prosperous nations. Throughout the Old Testament, the Lord of Israel is especially active among the poor and overrun. Jesus Christ clearly announces that he has also come to the oppressed and wants to work for change in their life. In that thrust,

the death of Jesus and the Lord's Supper are gifts to the poor and oppressed, who, it is said, feel less the weight of sin than they do the bondage produced by humans who exploit them. Such reasoning is understandable among people who know little freedom and have nothing earthly to look forward to under their present regimes. Secure and well-off Christians do well not to judge these brothers and sisters but to understand them when they tie together their dreams of political freedom on the one hand with their grasp of grace and liberation from sin on the other. The two are not the same thing, but freedom is contagious, and acts of imagination can help Christians everywhere share one another's aspirations and hopes that God will act.

Obsession with the code term *forgiveness of sins* has sometimes led partisans to narrow the meanings of the Lord's Table.They feel it wrong to connect eucharist or thanksgiving with the Supper because it may detract from the main theme. Yet the Great Thanksgiving is wholly preoccupied with being thankful to the loving God who not only created the world but also establishes in it a new relation with you. Others see forgiveness as in competition with the idea of communion, which some churches make central. But this is also unnecessarily cramping. Another of the Lutheran confessions connects the two: The same Lord's Supper that forgives is also "a true bond and union of Christians with Christ their head and with one another." We are, through this gift, "incorporated into the body of Christ, which is the church." Because we and others share unmerited forgiveness, we are on the same level at the Lord's Table. We have to be very careful about placing different levels where God does not, and about ruling people away whom Christ includes at his Supper.

Presence

What do we mean by the presence of Christ in this Supper?

I almost wish you had not brought this up. Perhaps if one could compute all the serious reflections that people bring to the Table, this issue of the presence would rank third. Whoever studies the history of dispute over the sacrament or listens to present-day theological debate might conclude that it is the number one issue. Why? It provides grist for intellectual debate and becomes a kind of test for people who like to sharpen their philosophical tools on things sacred. Being a historian of Christianity, I find it hard to look at the record without adding that if there is any feature of the Lord's Supper that brings out the meanest growls from partisan Christians, this is it. While the faithful people have the least difficulty with the theme, and while the New Testament offers almost no light, the subject naturally comes up in the mind of anyone who wants to be neat and inclusive in thought about the Lord's Supper.

To begin at the end, most writers on the subject say that the precise mode of Christ's presence is a mystery. Then they define mystery not as you do in a mystery story, where by the end of the book everything is clear—the butler did it; there is a conclusion, and the mystery ends. In a deeper sense mystery means rather that if you pull away one veil, another will still cover the subject; one could pull back veils for all the years that history gives and still not have exposed the subject to clear view. Emphatically, the presence of Christ is such a mystery. There can be honest and creative addresses to mystery, such as people make when they witness to the character of God, and less valid ones, of the sort one reads when people convince themselves they really have proved the existence of God or philosophically explained away the origin and presence of evil.

The special problem with the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper grows from the fact that the Scriptures are so nearly silent about it. This means that the Lord's Supper

is used to fill in many blanks. Other teachings are like barnacles attached to it, and it gets connected to other doctrines. Of course, it links with one's concept of where the risen and exalted Jesus Christ is, and whether Christ can reveal the fullness of God in earthly and finite forms. We leave those filled-in blanks and connected doctrines for other authors in other books for other days. You have the Lord's Supper on your mind.

Bring up the presence of Christ and you enter the zone where intellectuality has made its greatest mark on practice. In some churches, one gets the impression that to escape unworthiness—Paul's term for the unexamined life at the Lord's Supper—one must have a certain IQ. It would seem to be necessary for communicants to be able to mouth a precise number of memorized catechismal formulas. The church might make exception for the people in homes for the retarded, who are allowed to get by on simple affirmations of faith in Jesus Christ and a desire for the Lord's Table. But beyond them, those who merit access to Communion are those who have the prescriptions down cold. The twentieth-century church is trying to learn how to hold together two ideas: the integrity of understanding the Lord's Supper and the need not to impose barriers that the Pauline and Gospel accounts clearly do not erect. At the very least, one can learn not to attribute a mean spirit and bad faith to other Christians who are at least as concerned as you are to be faithful to the documents and the truth but who come off with a different reading.

You will never find an intellectually satisfying formula for the presence. Write that down and remember it as you read all the books, by people on your side and by others. In the end the honest writers all have to lapse back for a second to the language about mystery, where they began. Some of them succeed at representing accurately their own

church's teaching; they deserve awards from historical societies. Others ingeniously connect their personal philosophy to the teaching; they merit rewards from philosophical societies, though it is hard to picture a single philosopher likely to be impressed. My tone here might verge on the satirical and the antiintellectual. I do not intend that, since I, too, respect and even regard as necessary the idea of "loving God with all the mind" and extending this to the mode of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper. But here is a case where it is necessary to expect only small returns on expensive investments.

The Lord's Supper service has room for some ethereal images like that of the "thrice-holy" that faced Isaiah in the temple. But at the most personal point the sacrament is very physical. Just as God is revealed in the bad grammar of the well-preached word, so now you have to think in rather crass terms about another mode of the presence. The same kind of bread you will eat at home this noon is on this table. The wine here is similar to what you can have at dinner. You pass them through the same mouth. They carry the same germs. One may harden, the other turns sour, like any other bread and wine. People with bad breath and cavities receive them past droopy mustaches or elegantly tinted lips. Keep the crude images in mind, since no other ones will keep to the forefront the offense and the scandal. This food will pass through the body and be digested and excreted through natural processes. Jesus knew all about that when he pointed to bread and said "This—my body!" and when he lifted a cup and gave it with "This—my blood!" (Some scholars think that, where the Greek text uses the much fought-over word *is*, the language Jesus spoke led him simply to designate.)

You move to the Table and are given the gifts with the words "The body of Christ. . . . The blood of Christ," not "the bread of the earth, the wine of the vine." What are

you to think? Christ is somehow present in form as body, not as ghost. Christ is present in the whole church and in this congregation, in the whole event of the Lord's Supper—but also here and now. Christ is not naturally at home in your heart; there is no room for him there. But now more-than-naturally he finds room through your whole body, through faith, which also means because you hear the word promising his coming, and you cling to that promise. The promise means God recognized that in faith you accept the gift of Christ's presence, and God sees you as "one body" with all others who are in Christ, who receive this body and blood. When the minister hands over the bread or the cup, this handing over takes the same trajectory as the whole shape of God's act in Christ: Christ is handed over to evil people and for the sake of life.

One recent pondering, Robert Jenson's *Visible Words,* points to certain problems connected with two main theories about the presence. The first depends on the power of consecration—remember that ministerial sign of the cross above the bread and wine and how you thought *now* they are being changed? This approach set out to show how God, who can do anything, could make two things into one without destroying either. This is not an unintelligent approach, but it is an unnecessary one. The people who made so much of the act of consecrating were not too interested in explaining the presence. They wanted, as you do not, to carve out a role for the priesthood, to give priests a monopoly on something. Nothing worked better for this than to assert the exclusive right of the priest to a consecrating act that made two things one and yet kept them two things. Today Roman Catholicism has moved far from this concept, though it is still busy redefining evangelical priesthood.

Another way to explain the presence is to use spiritual language in order to remove distance. Yes, it says, by faith we can see that Jesus overleaps distance and is "at the right hand of the Father." Since distances mean nothing in the spiritual realm, that right-hand position extends here to the altar where the bread and wine are. But this approach makes Christ's presence conditional on your ability to imagine him being far and near; the presence is not straightforwardly here. This understanding also seems to shrink from the idea that the divine or the human can ever be embodied. Christians cannot leap out of their bodies to be spiritually with Christ at the right hand of the Father.

A third approach is more radical than these. The body of the risen Christ is not separated from any reality. Christ has risen in the body to be where God is. God is everywhere. If the risen Christ is, according to promise, embodied where this bread and this cup are, the only miracle you need to believe in is Christ's own resurrection. God is present wherever the promises of God are in effect. These promises are embodied. God has a body where these promises connect to the man Christ Jesus, or to this event called the Lord's Supper and the bread and the cup that are at its heart.

This bread and wine are, in the eyes of God, the presence of the man Jesus. No other body and blood of Christ are to be found by means of better telescopes in farther ranges of distance above the clouds. The risen Jesus is risen to new spiritual and bodily life, so we can now be audacious about the promises and say that the bread and the cup *are* the body. But this is true only for faith. The presence is hidden. The bread does not look like his body, and it did not do so when first he made the designation and offered the promise about his embodiment in the meal. There is more to Christ than this local and temporal presence. This "more" has to do with Christ's future when the word will be preached and when the bread and wine will be enjoyed again in this event. That is why after the service today the

ministers—or anyone—can consume the leftover wine and bread. Forget about the elements then. If their power as Christ's body depended upon consecration, you would have to be deconsecrate them or save them for ongoing power. The choice you make shows how you regard this event.

Within our generation it is not likely that all Christians will come to agree on this or on any other version of the presence. Remember my first words in this connection: These efforts could do no more than draw away some veils while leaving others to surround the mystery.

Commitment

You may find it valuable to reflect on still one other feature of the Lord's Supper. What does this event have to do with my way of life?

By concentrating on what passes through your mind during the liturgy, we have sounded rather churchly and even churchy. These reflections might have the smell of incense and the glow of candles about them, and thus they lose contact with the surrounding world. Yet you may spend all but a couple of your 168 weekly hours outside the sanctuary. Debates about catechisms and dogma will almost never come up there. The test of this Lord's Supper and its workings will be in the lives of communicants.

In the oldest words we have about this meal, in First Corinthians, Paul concerned himself with connecting Communion practices with the lives of the participants. Many of them lived in open scandal. That had to stop. Others made a noisy orgy out of the eucharist itself. Paul drew the congregation up short with questions: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16–17). That word *participation* is an urgent link between the

liturgy and Jesus Christ and then between Jesus Christ and all the rest of life. An exchange is going on here; in fact, behind the Greek word translated "participation" stands the word *exchange*. In a sense, Jesus Christ, the son of God and divine Savior, exchanges roles when he takes on flesh, humbles himself, gives himself in this bread and wine, and suffers death. And for that reason you undergo an exchange and get to share in the divine gifts and life.

No one should walk away from the Lord's Supper unchanged. It is good to use the visibility of Communion and its bodily actions as an occasional means to reflect on personal commitment. You may have heard some experts advise that congregations be kept busy singing hymns during Communion so that they will not accidentally glance up and see who else is at the Lord's Table. A good-looking person of one sex may distract an observer of the other. The sight of someone you cannot stand could disturb you. (In which case, why were you not reconciled before this hour? Seeing the person is a reminder of ongoing work for you!) We could turn this around: Seeing and being seen is a very useful exercise, since bodily movement to the Table is an announcement of intentions. Not "Look at me, folks, how pious I am for being here!" The day when attending church gave you status is long past. Instead "Look at me, folks, as I look at you. We are sinners, but we are participants in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We get to see what prophets and kings wanted to see but could not. We are part of the New Creation. Our bodies are on the line. We are committed."

A congregation is a gathering of people who bear one another's burdens. They are people who can support one another in illness and weakness, encourage one another when a task is heavy, speak a word of serious concern when they detect a lapse, and rejoice together in victories. Bodily presence at the Lord's Supper is not to be shunned

but celebrated. Jesus Christ is here in a bodily presence with the bread. Why should you lower your eyes? Jesus Christ is here also as a bodily presence in you and your fellow members, who are to be Christs to each other. You should not lower your eyes. Look up.

And as you look up, you see that the last communicants are leaving the Table. One or another of these reflections took control of your mind. You have to scoop up a hymnal, a worship folder, and some leftover thoughts, since the service will come rather abruptly to its end.

5. "In the Morning . . ."

The Communion being ended, and your reflections too, the ministers clear the table and replace the cup and plate while you join in singing the CANTICLE, a short hymn of thanks. The minister offers a PRAYER, pronounces a BLESSING on you and all the people, and says, "Go in peace. Serve the Lord." (This used to be: "*Ita missa est*"—"the mass is ended; go in peace." Hence the term *mass*.) So you go in peace. You glance at your watch, wondering whether the service was over-long, given the rather large communing congregation today. A secular thought crowds in. Has the roast burned? I've got to catch Harry and Marge to see about our get-together on Friday. Will that weak battery start the motor? Such thoughts were not completely out of mind during the service. They are with you yet. But God is present among people whose minds wander, whose attentions stray, whose staying-power is short. He is present in a sanctuary that never quite leaves behind its world. God is also present in a world that should become a sanctuary. His peace goes with you into that world.

You greet the ministers at the door, as you did back when they passed the peace of Christ, you chat with some friends, the car does start, the roast is only slightly burned, and most of the day is still ahead of you. By evening you will have passed through some of the usual cycles of boredom, drift, anger, and frustration. You hollered at the children. You grumbled about having to go to work tomorrow. You bet wrong on that choice of an evening

COMMUNION SERVICE

In Metropolitan Community Churches everywhere, we practice an open communion. Everyone is welcome at this table, you need only come seeking the presence of Jesus the Christ.

At Covenant we practice communion in two ways. First, the ushers will come among you with the elements and you may receive at your seat; or if you wish, you may come forward and be served at the altar.

God be with you.
And also with you.
Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to God.
Let us give thanks.
It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right to glorify you and to give you thanks, for you alone are God, living and true.

Countless throngs of angels stand before you to serve you night and day; and beholding the glory of your presence they offer you unceasing praise. Joining with them and giving voice to every creature under heaven, we acclaim you, and glorify your name, as we sing (say):

Holy, holy, holy God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God.
Hosanna in the highest.

God you loved the world so much that in the fullness of time, you sent Jesus to be our Savior. To the poor Jesus proclaimed the good news of salvation; to prisoners freedom; to the sorrowful, joy. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, ate with the scorned and forgotten, and gave this meal as a pledge of his abiding presence.

At supper he took bread, and after giving thanks, he broke the bread and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you." When the supper was over, he took the cup and gave thanks. He gave the cup to his disciples and said, "Drink from this all of you; this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you and many for the forgiveness of sins." When we eat this bread and drink this cup we experience anew the presence of [redacted] Jesus the Christ and look forward to his coming in final victory.

God, we pray that in your goodness and mercy your Holy Spirit may descend upon us and upon these gifts, sanctifying them and showing them to be holy gifts for your holy people, the bread of life and the cup of salvation, the body and blood of Jesus the Christ. Grant that all who share this bread and cup may become one body and one spirit, a living sacrifice in Christ to the praise of your name.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ, all glory and honor are yours Almight God, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

Let us recall the mystery of our faith:

Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

(The elements are distributed.)

Let us pray:
God, we give you thanks for these holy mysteries which bring to us here on earth a share of the transformed life to come, through Jesus Christ our Savior. May we go in peace to serve God and our neighbor in all that we do. Amen.

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ARTICLE III
DOCTRINE, SACRAMENTS AND RITES

A. DOCTRINE: Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land.

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We believe:

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2. That the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, showing forth God to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, completely and ultimately on earth in the being of Jesus Christ.

3. That Jesus...the Christ...historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is God incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that by being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image.

4. That the Holy Spirit is God making known God's love and interest to all people. The Holy Spirit is God, available to and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping.

5. Every person is justified by grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

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7. The Church serves to bring all people to God through Christ. To this end, it shall arrange for regular services of worship, prayer, interpretation of the Scriptures, and edification through the teaching and preaching of the Word.

B. SACRAMENTS: This Church embraces two holy Sacraments:

1. BAPTISM by water and the Spirit, as recorded in the Scriptures, shall be a sign of the dedication of each life to God and God's service. Through the words and acts of this sacrament, the recipient is identified as God's own Child.

2. HOLY COMMUNION is the partaking of blessed bread and fruit of the vine in accordance with the words of Jesus, our Sovereign: "This is my body...this is my blood." (Matthew 26:26-28). All who believe, confess and repent and seek God's love through Christ, after examining their consciences, may freely participate in the communal meal, signifying their desire to be received into community with Jesus Christ, to be saved by Jesus Christ's sacrifice, to participate in Jesus Christ's resurrection, and to commit their lives anew to the service of Jesus Christ.

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3. The RITE OF HOLY UNION and the RITE OF HOLY MATRIMONY are the spiritual joining of two persons in a manner fitting and proper by a duly authorized clergy of the Church. After both persons have been counseled and apprised of their responsibilities one towards the other, this rite of conferring God's blessing may be performed.

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ARTICLE IV
MINISTRY

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2. DEACONS: As outlined in the New Testament, their office is an historic ministry of service and aid within the Christian Church.

(a) RESPONSIBILITIES: In accordance with the spiritual responsibilities of the office, deacons minister to those in need, the sick, the friendless, and those persons who may be in distress. Deacons serve, and may administer the Rites and Sacraments, under the authorization and direction of their appointing authority. Except in extraordinary circumstances, deacons shall not serve on local church Boards of Directors/local church administrative bodies.

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ARTICLE IV
MINISTRY

The UFMCC affirms the universal priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5-10). All members of the Church are called by God to a ministry of the Gospel of Christ in the Church and in the world.

UFMCC decrees that all people shall have equality of access and opportunity which is free from discrimination on grounds of gender, sexual orientation, race, age, physical challenge, HIV status, health status, gender identification, nationality, or economic status in terms of:

1] Employment and personnel procedures
2] Service delivery -- all that we do.

A. MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

1. The Priesthood of All Believers: Laypeople are the People of God, called by God and authorized by Scripture to respond to the Word, serving as Christ served, to the end that the Church may be edified and the world transformed. UFMCC affirms that this is the ministry of every layperson in this Fellowship.

2. DEACONS: As outlined in the New Testament, their office is an historic ministry of service and aid within the Christian Church.

(a) RESPONSIBILITIES: In accordance with the spiritual responsibilities of the office, deacons minister to those in need, the sick, the friendless, and those persons who may be in distress. Deacons serve, and may administer the Rites and Sacraments, under the authorization and direction of their appointing authority. Except in extraordinary circumstances, deacons shall not serve on local church Boards of Directors/local church administrative bodies.

(b) QUALIFICATIONS: Deacons shall be members in good standing of a local church body and be persons of spiritual mind, exemplary lives, joyful outlook, sound judgement, and of proven dedicated service.

(c) APPOINTMENTS:

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ARTICLE III
DOCTRINE, SACRAMENTS AND RITES

A. DOCTRINE: Christianity is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and is the religion set forth in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ is foretold in the Old Testament, presented in the New Testament, and proclaimed by the Christian Church in every age and in every land.

Founded in the interest of offering a church home to all who confess and believe, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches moves in the mainstream of Christianity.

Our faith is based upon the principles outlined in the historic creeds: Apostles and Nicene.

We believe:

1. In one triune God, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, of one substance and of three persons: God, - our Parent-Creator; Jesus Christ, the only begotten son of God, God in flesh, human; and the Holy Spirit, - God as our Sustainer.

2. That the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God, showing forth God to every person through the law and the prophets, and finally, completely and ultimately on earth in the being of Jesus Christ.

3. That Jesus...the Christ...historically recorded as living some 2,000 years before this writing, is God incarnate, of human birth, fully God and fully human, and that by being one with God, Jesus has demonstrated once and forever that all people are likewise Children of God, being spiritually made in God's image.

4. That the Holy Spirit is God making known God's love and interest to all people. The Holy Spirit is God, available to and working through all who are willing to place their welfare in God's keeping.

5. Every person is justified by grace to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

6. We are saved from loneliness, despair and degradation through God's gift of grace, as was declared by our Savior. Such grace is not earned, but is a pure gift from a God of pure love. We further commend the community of the faithful to a life of prayer; to seek genuine forgiveness for unkind, thoughtless and unloving acts; and to a committed life of Christian service.

7. The Church serves to bring all people to God through Christ. To this end, it shall arrange for regular services of worship, prayer, interpretation of the Scriptures, and edification through the teaching and preaching of the Word.

B. SACRAMENTS: This Church embraces two holy Sacraments:

1. BAPTISM by water and the Spirit, as recorded in the Scriptures, shall be a sign of the dedication of each life to God and God's service. Through the words and acts of this sacrament, the recipient is identified as God's own Child.

2. HOLY COMMUNION is the partaking of blessed bread and fruit of the vine in accordance with the words of Jesus, our Sovereign: "This is my body...this is my blood." (Matthew 26:26-28). All who believe, confess and repent and seek God's love through Christ, after examining their consciences, may freely participate in the communal meal, signifying their desire to be received into community with Jesus Christ, to be saved by Jesus Christ's sacrifice, to participate in Jesus Christ's resurrection, and to commit their lives anew to the service of Jesus Christ.

C. RITES: The Rites of the Church as performed by its duly authorized ministers shall consist of the following:

1. The RITE OF ORDINATION is the setting apart of duly qualified persons for the professional ministry of this Church. It is evidenced by the laying on of hands by authorized ordained clergy, pursuant to these Bylaws.

2. The RITE OF ATTAINING MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH shall be conducted by the pastor or pastoral leader before a local congregation at any regular worship service. After completing classes for instruction in the beliefs and doctrines of the Church, a baptized Christian may become a member in good standing of the local church group through a letter of transfer from a recognized Christian body or through affirmation of faith.

3. The RITE OF HOLY UNION and the RITE OF HOLY MATRIMONY are the spiritual joining of two persons in a manner fitting and proper by a duly authorized clergy of the Church. After both persons have been counseled and apprised of their responsibilities one towards the other, this rite of conferring God's blessing may be performed.

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altar with the right side up. Thus, when it is refolded as the altar is cleared, crumbs of bread are folded into it and not dropped onto the mensa or the floor. It is carried to and from the altar in the burse. A fresh corporal is used for each celebration of the Eucharist, and each congregation needs several corporals.

Pall

Used to cover the chalice before and after Communion, the pall is a linen-covered square of stiff cardboard, aluminum, or plastic. The size of the pall is determined by the diameter of the chalice, but it is usually six to nine inches square. The top of the pall is often embroidered in white with a cross or a symbol relating to the church year.

The linen covering the pall is usually sewn as a pocket, so that the stiff lining may be removed for laundering the linen. A clean pall should always be used.

Purificators

Purificators are square linen napkins used to wipe the rim of the chalice during the distribution. The size depends on the size of the chalice, since the purificator is draped over the chalice before and after the celebration, but the size is often twelve to fifteen inches square. It is folded like the corporal, except right side out.

Several purificators are needed for each chalice for each eucharistic service. When not in use, they are kept in the burse.

Veil

Several kinds of veils may be used. The chalice veil matches the paraments and vestments in the color for the day; when this veil is used, the burse matches the veil in color and fabric.

When a whole loaf of bread is used for the Eucharist, a white linen veil—perhaps a second corporal or a large purificator—is sometimes used to cover it prior to the offertory.

Some congregations use a large white linen veil as a post-Communion cover for the vessels and elements.

Burse

Sacramental linens are carried to and from the altar in the burse, which is an envelopelike case. The burse matches the chalice veil, paraments, stole, and chasuble in the liturgical color for the day. It is constructed with two squares of cardboard, about nine inches square, each covered with linen and bound together on one side. This is covered with another piece of fabric, matching the paraments, so that the sides are pleated like bellows.

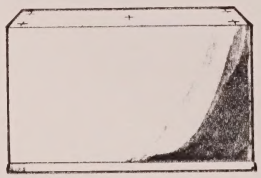
Congregations using chalice veils and burses will need a set in each liturgical color.

Paraments

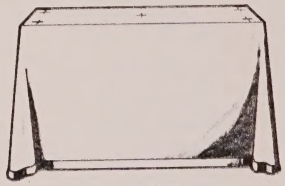
Paraments adorn the altar in the appointed colors of the liturgical day or season, helping to make the altar the visual focus of the worship space. In pointing to the day or season through colors and symbols, paraments serve also devotional and educational functions. Paraments have been used since at least the fifth century A.D.

There are five types of altar paraments in use: the frontal, the Laudean frontal, the superfrontal, the antependium, and the frontlet. The type selected for a specific altar is influenced by the style of the altar, and may also vary according to the time of the church year.

A frontal covers the entire front of the altar, from the front top edge of the mensa down to the predella. This type of frontal



Frontal



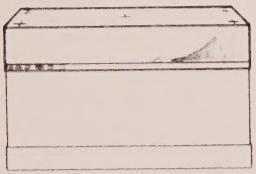
Laudean Frontal

may be attached to the protector linen, which is covered with the fair linen.

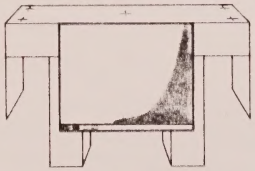
A Laudean frontal (sometimes known as a Jacobean frontal)

covers the entire altar, hanging to the predella on all four sides of a freestanding altar or the sides and front of an east-wall altar.

A superfrontal may be used alone or as a part of the frontal. It covers the length of the altar, but hangs down only ten to twelve inches from the top of the mensa.

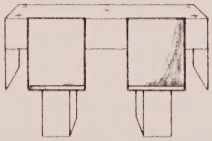


Superfrontal



Antependium

An antependium, much narrower than a frontal, covers one-third to one-half the front of the altar. It may hang all the way to the floor, but usually is made to extend over the front of the altar about three-fourths the height of the altar. It is hung in the center of the altar.



Frontlets

Frontlets are hung down the front of the altar in pairs. They are usually two to three feet wide and extend about two-thirds of the distance to the predella.

Colors

Congregations will find it useful to provide at least eight sets of paraments and vestments to accommodate the colors of the church year.

White is the color of light, gladness, purity, and joy in Christ. White is thus the liturgical color appointed for festivals of

Christ—the Annunciation, the Visitation, Christmas and its season, the Name of Jesus, the Epiphany, the Baptism of Our Lord, the Presentation, the Transfiguration, the Sundays of Easter (although gold is an alternate color for Easter Day itself), and Christ the King. White is also used for certain other festivals (such as the Holy Trinity) and commemorations, and it is the alternate color for Maundy Thursday. If seasonal symbols appear on paraments, it may be wise to have more than one white set, in order to relate each more closely to the varying times of the church year.

Bright red is the color of fire—the fire of the Holy Spirit. Red is used for the Day of Pentecost, for martyrs' days, and for certain other days celebrating events in the church, such as Reformation, ordination, and church dedications and anniversaries.

Scarlet is a hue deeper than red; scarlet is the color of blood. It is used during Holy Week—from the Sunday of the Passion (Palm Sunday) through Maundy Thursday. The color should be selected carefully so it is not confused with the bright red used for festivals.

Purple is the penitential color of Lent. It is also the alternate color for Advent, when it is interpreted as the royal color of the coming King. In congregations where purple is used for both Lent and Advent, it will be helpful to have two different sets, with appropriate and distinctive symbols on each.

Blue is the preferred color for Advent, because it is the color of hope, a central theme of Advent. Pale and navy blues should be avoided, in favor of royal blue.

Green is the color of growth, and it is used during the seasons after Epiphany and Pentecost.

Gold is the appropriate alternate color for Easter Day, since that day is the "queen of feasts," the most important day in the church year. The use of gold paraments on that one day helps to distinguish it in a special visual way from the remainder of the year.

Black, the color of ashes and humiliation and mourning, is appointed for Ash Wednesday.

Missal Stand and Altar Book

The missal stand holds the large service book (*Lutheran Book of Worship Ministers Edition*). It may be a wood or metal bookstand, or simply be a cushion on which the service book rests for the celebration of the Eucharist. The missal stand and altar book should be removed when not in use.

Eucharistic Vessels

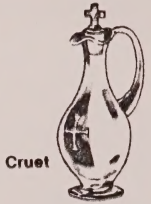
Vessels used for the celebration of the Holy Communion usually constitute a matched set of fine metal such as silver or gold. Pewter or earthenware vessels may also be used. The appearance and material of the vessels should be worthy of the precious elements they hold—containers appropriate for the body and blood of our Lord. A minimum set of eucharistic vessels includes a chalice, paten, and flagon or cruet. If hosts (rather than a whole loaf of bread) are used, a ciborium or host box is also needed.

The chalice is the large cup used for the consecration and distribution of the sacramental wine. The cup portion of the chalice is attached to the base (or foot) by the stem. If the distribution is not by common cup, the chalice needs a pouring lip. In this situation, the wine is poured from the chalice into a small glass held by the communicant. Prefilled individual glasses should *never* be used. Increasingly, congregations are returning to the traditional common cup, because it is a fuller symbol of the unity we share in Christ.

The paten is the plate used for the sacramental bread. Its size depends on the type of bread used. It is traditional practice for the paten to be set on the rim of the chalice for vesting in veil and burse. When a whole loaf of bread is used, however, another larger paten or basket is usually also needed.

A flagon or cruet is usually used to hold the wine before it is poured into the chalice. The flagon is a tall covered pitcher,

usually made of fine metal. The cruet is a glass vessel with a stopper, often topped with a cross.



When hosts (wafers) rather than a loaf of bread are used, they are kept in a ciborium or host box. A ciborium is similar to a chalice, but has a fitted lid. A host box (also known as a pyx) is a short round container with a lid.

In some congregations the presiding minister ritually cleanses his or her hands prior to the Great Thanksgiving. For this, a small dish known as a lavabo bowl is used. The water is poured over the hands from a cruet, and the hands are dried with a lavabo towel. This is a small linen towel, usually twelve by eighteen inches. It is folded lengthwise, right side out, in thirds, so that it will hang evenly over the arm of the assisting minister or acolyte.

A spoon is sometimes useful for removing foreign particles from the wine in a chalice. The bowl of a spoon made for this purpose is perforated.

place, that all linens are freshly laundered and ironed, that all of the sacramental vessels are clean and polished, and that sufficient quantities of bread and wine are ready.

Most important in all of the preparatory work is that it be done with the reverence and good order that befit Christ's presence. Awareness of Christ's presence in the sacrament will ensure that the work is done with genuine joy and gratitude for God's grace. To prepare the Lord's table is an immense privilege!

There are various acceptable ways of arranging the vessels for the Eucharist. The method used in a given parish will be determined by the available chancel furnishings and vessels, by the pastor's preferences, and by a sense of good liturgical order.

In determining parish customs, the altar guild and the pastor must first ascertain the resources of the church. Is the credence to be used? Is the altar free-standing? Are burse and veil to be used? Is the paten a proper size to fit into the rim of the chalice? Is there an offertory procession? Is the pastor right- or left-handed? Are there assisting ministers? Answers to questions such as these will help in selecting a method for preparing the table of the Lord.

The chalice is often vested in the traditional manner. It is done in several steps:

1. A purificator folded in thirds lengthwise is placed over the mouth of the empty chalice, so that the right and left sides hang evenly over the edges of the chalice.
2. The paten is placed on top of the purificator. (If hosts rather than whole loaf are to be used, a large host may be placed on the paten.)
3. The paten is covered with the pall.

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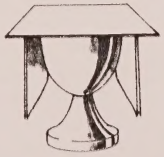

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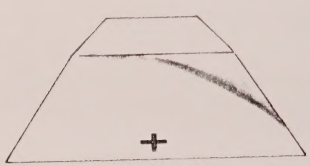

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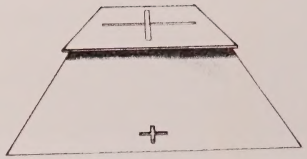

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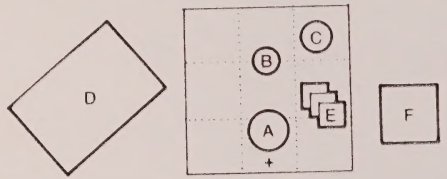
4. The chalice veil in the proper color of the day is placed over the pall and arranged so that a trapezoid is seen when viewed from the front.
5. The corporal and additional purificators are placed in the burse, which matches the veil. The burse is laid on top of the vested chalice.

It is preferable for the vested chalice (as well as flagon and other vessels) to be kept on a credence until the offering, at which time an assisting minister carries it to the altar and sets the table. However, if there is no credence, the vested chalice may be set on the altar prior to the service.

During the offering, the corporal is placed on the altar, and the vessels are set on the corporal. The following arrangement is appropriate when a whole loaf of bread is used:



A-Paten
B-Chalice
C-Flagon or Cruet
D-Missal Stand
E-Purificators
F-Burse

4

Vestments

Vestments are the distinctive garments worn by worship leaders when performing liturgical functions. In various forms vestments have been used since Old Testament times, although Christian vestments are derived largely from garments of the late Roman Empire. Vestments have both utilitarian and symbolic value.

There are several basic purposes for vestments. First, they designate particular liturgical functions. It has been almost universal in human history that people have worn particular clothes for particular functions and particular occasions. For worship leaders, the vestments place less visual emphasis on the person and greater emphasis on the liturgical role being performed, in order that attention and glory may be given to God rather than to the worship leader. Second, in their beauty, vestments reflect and witness to the beauty of God. The beauty of vestments is primarily in their texture, form, and color, rather than in any symbols sewn on them. Third, vestments reflect the continuity of Christian worship through history. Worship leaders today wear essentially the same types of vestments that have been worn since earlier centuries of the Christian church. Thus, vestments provide a visual continuity with our ancestors in the faith.

Clergy Vestments

Alb

The alb is a white ankle-length garment with close-fitting sleeves. It is the church's oldest vestment. The name comes from the Latin word *albus*, which means white, and the whiteness symbolizes the purity and light of Christ. As a vestment, the alb derives from the white tunic worn by professional persons in the ancient Roman Empire. Albs were worn by clergy for all services until the eleventh century, when the surplice (see below) began to be used for noneucharistic worship. Today the alb is usually worn for all services except Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of the Day (Compline). When the Holy Communion is celebrated, the presiding minister usually wears a chasuble over his or her alb.

The alb is gathered at the waist by a cincture, a white rope or heavy white cord tied at the side. For clergy, the stole is placed through or tucked under the cincture. An amice, a rectangular neckcloth, has long been worn as a sort of collar with the alb. The amice originated as a means to protect the alb and other vestments from perspiration. Some new albs have collars resembling amices.

Stole

Ordained clergy wear stoles over the alb or surplice as a sign of their work and their ordination. The stole is a symbol of the yoke of obedience to Christ (see Matt. 11:28–30). The stole, being the sign of ordination, is never worn by a lay person.

The stole is a long, narrow band of heavy fabric worn around the neck. When worn with the alb for Holy Communion, the stole is crossed over the breast and tucked under or through the cincture. When worn over the surplice for other services, the stole hangs straight in front.

Stoles are worn in the appointed color for the day, and in

fabric and color they usually match the chasuble and paraments.

Chasuble

The chasuble is the principal vestment for the presiding minister during the celebration of the Holy Communion. It is a very full vestment worn like a poncho over the alb and stole. The fullness of the chasuble symbolizes the fact that the eucharistic meal is intended to embrace all baptized people; thus, the chasuble is a sign that the abundance of God's grace and the abundance of the eucharistic feast are intended for all God's family.

Chasubles are made of a wide variety of rich fabrics. Their primary symbolism is in their fullness and color, rather than in any symbols attached to them. It is not necessary to put symbols on symbols! The chasuble is often decorated with an orphrey, a strip of contrasting fabric in front and back—either a straight vertical pillar or the shape of a Y.

It is ideal for the chasuble to match the stole, as well as the paraments, burse, and chalice veil. The color is that appointed for the day.

Cassock

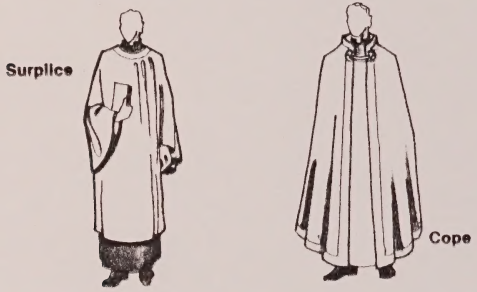
The cassock is not actually a vestment, but rather is a basic garment over which vestments are worn. Cassocks are black ankle-length garments, which are fitted from the waist up and have narrow sleeves. Cassocks usually button or snap all the way down the front.

For noneucharistic services (especially Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline), it is customary for worship leaders to wear cassock and surplice. At eucharistic services the cassock may be worn under the alb.

Surplice

The full-sleeved white vestment worn over the cassock is the surplice. Surplices are at least knee-length, and they derive from the longer and more tailored alb. The whiteness of the surplice symbolizes the purity of Christ.

The surplice is customarily worn over the cassock for Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Prayer at the Close of the Day (Compline).



Cope

The cope is essentially an ornate procession cloak or cape adapted for liturgical use. It is open in the front, fastened near the neck with a clasp known as a morse.

Copes may be worn for festive services of Morning and Evening Prayer, and for ceremonial occasions such as the procession in a wedding, funeral, ordination, installation, or confirmation.

Pectoral Cross

A pectoral cross (from the Latin word *pectus*, which means breast) is a cross on a chain worn by a bishop. It is presented during the bishop's installation as an emblem of the office.

Other Vestments

Lay assisting ministers and acolytes are also appropriately vested for their responsibility in worship leadership. Their vest-

ments are determined by those worn by the presiding minister. That is, if the presiding minister wears an alb, the assisting ministers and acolytes also wear albs. If the presiding minister wears a cassock and surplice, other participating clergy wear cassock and surplice, and lay assisting ministers and acolytes are vested in cassocks and cottas. The cotta is a waist-length version of the surplice. Crucifers usually wear albs.

Choirs, organists, and other musicians usually wear white albs or black cassocks and white cottas; robes resembling academic gowns are to be avoided because of their connotations, and persons who are not ordained do not wear stoles.

Confirmands sometimes wear white capes, which are a reminder of the white baptismal garment. Robes that are academic in style should be avoided, because they give an incorrect and inappropriate connotation to the confirmation rite—it is *not* a graduation, which is what academic garments suggest.

Caring for Vestments

The cleaning, storage, and preparation of vestments are usually the responsibility of the altar guild. Vestments should be kept clean, fresh, and ready to wear at any time, like any other good clothes for special occasions.

Most albs, surplices, and cottas are now made of washable fabrics, and may simply be laundered and pressed. Nonwashable fabrics and all other vestments require dry cleaning by professionals. Most vestments are stored on hangers, but chasubles may be laid flat in large drawers in the sacristy; it is helpful to pad the folds with tissue to avoid creases and possible damage to the fabric.

Cross

A large cross or crucifix is usually placed near the altar for worship services, though its design and placement may take various forms. The most historic form in liturgical usage is the processional cross, which has been used since the fourth century; "fixed" altar crosses date only from the seventeenth century. Because the cross or crucifix symbolizes Christ's death and resurrection for our redemption, it should be prominent in size and of quality design and construction.

If a processional cross is used, it is carried by its shaft in the entrance procession and placed in a floor standard or wall bracket in the chancel. It is also used for processions outside the church (for example, on the Sunday of the Passion and the Day of Pentecost, or at graveside). The processional cross may also be used for the gospel procession.

Otherwise, a fixed cross may be suspended from the ceiling above the altar or placed on the wall behind the altar. If the altar is not freestanding, the cross stands on the retable.